

Canadian Expeditionary Force Study Group

*Dedicated to the Study of the Canadian
Expeditionary Force The Great War of
1914 – 1921*

CA40: Report #2 Submitted to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission

On March 1, 2016 a research team composed of members of the Canadian Expeditionary Force Study Group submitted an [Interim Report](#) concerned with the location of the Canadian 1st Division Burial Ground known as “CA40”.

The CWGC reference to the burial ground is contained in the documentation for the [Nine Elms Military Cemetery, Thélus](#):

The rest of the cemetery was made after the Armistice by the concentration of British and French graves from the battlefields of Vimy and Neuville-St. Vaast and from certain small cemeteries, including: – GRAVE CA 40, THELUS, 274 metres West of the main road, by the light railway track. Here were buried 44 Canadian soldiers of the 16th Battalion who fell on the 9th April 1917.

We have now correctly identified the names of the 44 men registered with an initial burial site at CA40 (51b.A.10.c.9.7), four (4) of whom are confirmed buried in the Nine Elms Military Cemetery, Thélus. An additional four (4) men were recovered from those trench map coordinates in 1920 and concentrated into the Lieven Communal Cemetery Extension. Those men did not have a burial reference to the name “CA40” (see COG-BR [2020936](#)).

In the second phase of the research program, which has taken an additional 16 months, we have conducted a thorough examination of the burial records for all the men whose exhumations were attributed to battlefield burial at CA40, plus the later, concentration and reburial, records for the Nine Elms Military Cemetery. Two additional site visits were also completed, the first in April 2016 and the second in April 2017. The site inspectors also walked the path of the 16th Battalion for April 9, 1917, using the details provided in the period war diaries. Based on the results to date, we are pleased to report on our findings:

1. There remain a number of possible locations for the initial battlefield burial site, known as CA40, however the importance of locating the site is now a moot point. The evidence is clear that the men were exhumed from that site, if they were buried there, and were concentrated into the Nine Elms Military Cemetery. This is in agreement with the period reports from the CWGC.
2. The recreation of the Nine Elms database ([Excel Spreadsheet Download- Attachment #1](#) or [PDF Format Viewable – Attachment #1](#)), to which we added back all the UNKNOWNs, provided a list of 682 Commonwealth grave sites or memorials. We added to this database all the trench map coordinates for the Canadian burials that were the result of concentrations. A comparison of the initial burial location of the 97 Unknown Canadians provided clear evidence that there was a minimum of 40 graves in the cemetery that could contain the remains of a 16th Battalion soldier. Other researchers stated that the graves located in the Nine Elms Military Cemetery were checked and the men of the 16th Battalion were not there. In our opinion, that research did not account for the fact that they were not identified at the time of the concentrations, thus there was no way to identify them by battalion, let alone by name. The statement is therefore redundant.

3. An examination of the burial records of all of the men of the 16th Battalion that were identified during the concentration of the graves into the Nine Elms Military Cemetery revealed that some were reported to have been buried in a battlefield cemetery identified as “CA40” and at a location identified as **36c.A.10.c.9.7** (*note that we know this was an error and the coordinates should have been 51b.A.10.c.9.7*). A copy of the burial documents revealed the following:

- [Sergeant Colin Matson Wisdom #16372](#) was not buried at **CA40**, rather at **CA39** located at **51b.A.11.c.3.0**. The grave was subsequently destroyed in later battles and he is remembered by “Arras Road Cemetery Memorial 1 – Headstone 5” ([PDF Format Viewable – Attachment #2a](#)).
- [Private Walter McNicol #718887](#) was not buried at **CA40**, rather at **CA6** located at **51b.A.11.d.2.3**. He is buried in Plot 1 Row D Grave 3 at the Nine Elms Military Cemetery ([PDF Format Viewable – Attachment #2b](#)).
- [Private Firth Duncan #718675](#) whose grave registrations refers to CA40 at **51b.A.10.c.9.7** was exhumed from **51b.A.10.d.2.6**. He is buried in Plot 1 Row G Grave 39 at the Nine Elms Military Cemetery ([PDF Format Viewable – Attachment #2c](#)).
- [Private James Marion Brown #160741](#) was exhumed from **CB10** located at **51b.A.11.a.7.6**, not from the reported battlefield burial site at **CA40**. He is buried in Plot 4 Row C Grave 1 at the Nine Elms Military Cemetery ([PDF Format Viewable – Attachment #2d](#)).

A fifth man, [Pte. Harry Dingwall #730549](#), of the 1st Division 13th Machine Gun Coy, was also noted as buried at **CA40** and was later determined to have been buried at **CA39**. He is now remembered at Nine Elms Military Cemetery on Arras Road Cemetery Memorial 1 – Headstone 44 ([PDF Format Viewable – Attachment #2e](#)).

4. An analysis of the BR-Burial Return Records ([Excel Spreadsheet Download – Attachment #3](#) or [PDF Format Viewable – Attachment #3](#)) shows that 36 of the 44 men, listed as buried at CA40, share common record references with Brown (BR 2247), McNicol (BR 2248), Duncan (BR 2248) and Wisdom (BR 2249). The remaining 8 men of the 44 are common to BR 2250. Future research on all the men in the Nine Elms Military Cemetery may provide additional linkage to the (BR) Burial Returns.

The findings reported above provide compelling evidence that the information reported in the period cemetery register for the Nine Elms Military Cemetery, Thélus was correct and that the 44 men were concentrated from various battlefield burial sites into the cemetery, four (4) of which are identified. Therefore, in the light of our findings, we do not believe that there is a mass grave containing the remains of the other 40 men of the 16th Battalion. This does not mean that there are not additional remains in the battlefield area, from various Commonwealth units, that have yet to be recovered.

We would suggest that based on the initial findings (cemetery register report) of the IWGC/CWGC, coupled with our substantiating research, that a “**Special Memorial B**” be placed in the Nine Elms Military Cemetery; listing the names of the 40 men of the 16th Battalion that are believed to be buried in the cemetery but, whereas, their actual graves are unknown.

Note:

PDF Versions of the CA40 Reports are available here:

- [CA40 Report #1](#)

- [CA40 Report #2](#)

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